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ABSTRACT

This booklet offers guidelines for the development of dissemination strategies, especially those concerned with research and programs. Individual sections address: the importance of including sound dissemination plans in grant proposals, factors found to be closely related to information utilization in the dissemination process, a philosophical framework of dissemination and utilization, development of an organizational dissemination policy, ten elements of an effective dissemination plan (such as goals, objectives, user identification, content, medium, evaluation, and identification of barriers), dissemination planning through answering questions keyed to the ten elements, development of a dissemination strategy, timing of dissemination planning, training events and product development, and dissemination assistance and resources. (Web sites offering related reading are listed.) (DB)

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF DISABILITY RESEARCH

SHAPING EXCELLENCE THROUGH RESEARCH

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE DISSEMINATION PLAN

JANUARY 2001

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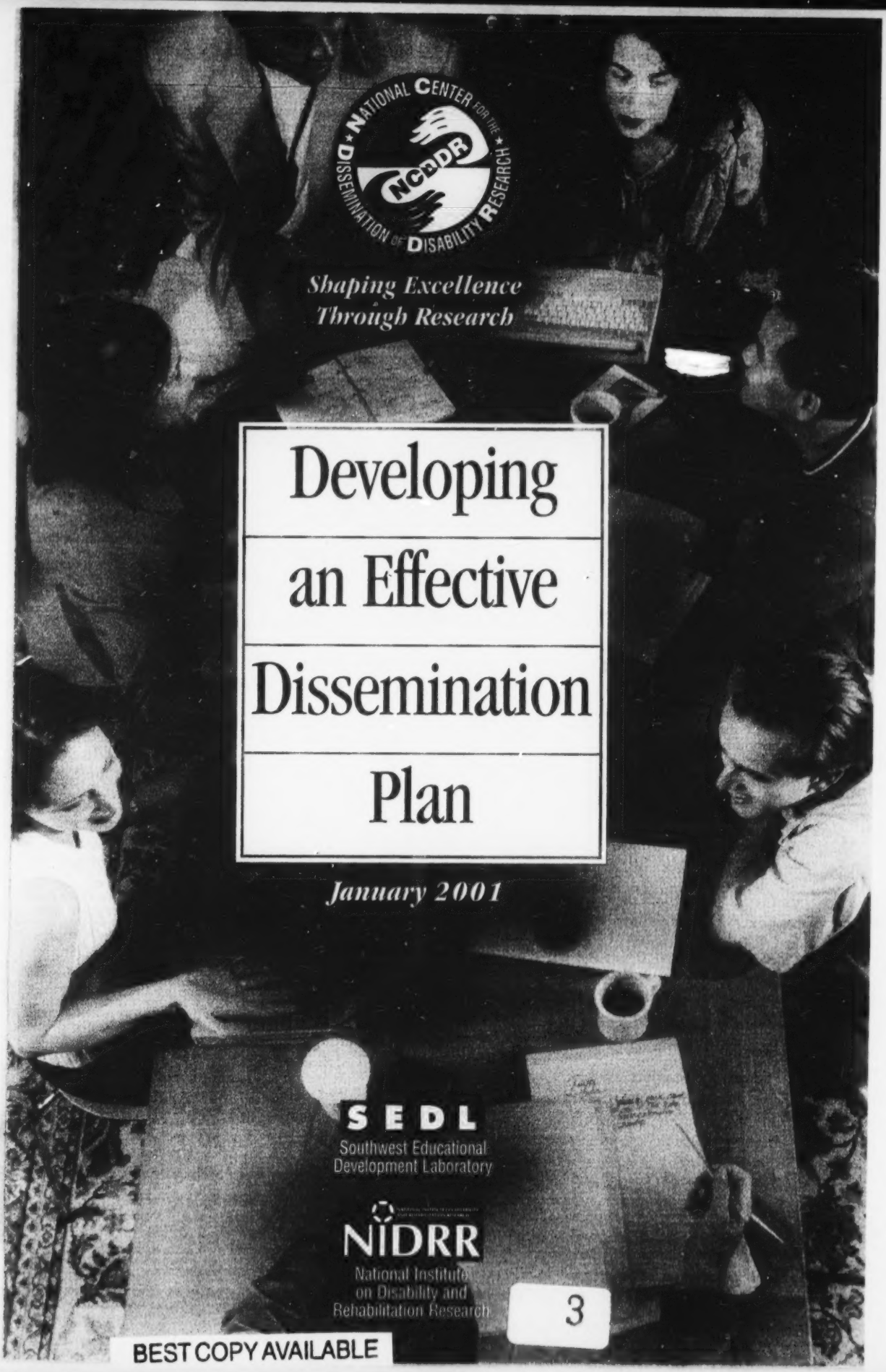
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Shaping Excellence Through Research
Developing an Effective Dissemination Plan
January 2001
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Developing an Effective Dissemination Plan

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction 2
What's in it for Me? 4
Utilization is the Goal 4
Philosophical Framework of Dissemination and Utilization ... 5
Your Dissemination Policy 6
Ten Elements of an Effective Dissemination Plan 8
Dissemination Planning through Answered Questions 10
Developing a Dissemination Strategy 15
Timing 17
Training Events and Product Development 17
Dissemination Assistance and Resources 18
Related Reading Available Online from the NCDDR 22
References 24

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Introduction

Grant application priorities vary in their emphasis on dissemination as a necessary part of a successful proposed scope-of-work. Often, however, the results and impact of your grant efforts rest in the effectiveness of your dissemination activities. With effective dissemination, the awareness, recognition, and possible use of your grant outcomes may be greater than expected. Sound planning can help achieve this result.

Success in dissemination is more likely to occur when the "packaging" and overall nature of the information has been influenced by appropriate input from the potential recipient/user audience. Dissemination should produce an effect — *use of the information* — on the part of the recipient. Success in dissemination will be limited when a proposed scope-of-work approaches it as if it were: (1) the simple production of documents in the form of journal articles, book chapters, or reports, or (2) the relocation of such documents from Point A to Point B.

For the NIDRR grant community, *dissemination activities* have been defined this way:

> In carrying out a dissemination activity under this program, a grantee must systematically distribute information or knowledge through a variety of ways to potential users or beneficiaries.
>
> (Authority: Section 202, 29 U.S. C. 761a; Federal Register, 2/6/97, pp. 5711-5721)

Many in the dissemination field incorporate ideas about communication as a two-way process. The job of dissemination may be extended to provide support for actual changes to occur as an intended result of dissemination activities.

NIDRR has also defined *utilization activities* for its grantees:

> In carrying out a utilization activity under this program, a grantee must relate research findings to practical applications in planning, policy making, program administration, and delivery of services to individuals with disabilities.
>
> (Authority: Section 202, 29 U.S. C. 761a; Federal Register, 2/6/97, pp. 5711-5721)

The experience of the NCDDR and the literature concerning dissemination strategies lead to the perception that to be effective, dissemination systems need the following characteristics (Mace-Matluck, 1986; Pollard, 1989; Pollard and Rood, 1989; Westbrook & Lumbley, 1990):

- They are oriented toward the needs of the user, incorporating the types and levels of information needed into the forms and language preferred by the user.
- They use varied dissemination methods, including written information, electronic media, and person-to-person contact.
- They include both proactive and reactive dissemination channels — that is, they include information that users have identified as important, and they include information that users may not know to request but that they are likely to need.
- Clear channels are established for users to make their needs and priorities known to the disseminating agency.
- They recognize and provide for the "natural flow" of the four levels of dissemination that have been identified as leading to utilization: spread, exchange, choice, and implementation.
- They draw upon existing resources, relationships, and networks to the maximum extent possible while building new resources as needed by users.
- They include effective quality control mechanisms to assure that information to be included in the system is accurate, relevant, and representative.
- They include sufficient information so that the user can determine the basic principles underlying specific practices and the settings in which these practices may be used most productively.
- They establish linkages to resources that may be needed to implement the information — usually referred to as technical assistance.

Dissemination approaches that implement a mechanical, one-way flow of written information have not proven to be effective in encouraging widespread adoption and implementation of new programs, ideas, and strategies.

What's in it for me?

In many ways, the ultimate impact of your planned project rests in the effectiveness of your dissemination strategy. To a growing degree, proposal applications are being reviewed in terms of their level of contribution to the intended target user group(s). Grantees are being reviewed in different ways and asked to provide data that directly or indirectly relate to the way in which the results of projects are reaching their intended target audiences with information they find useful.

It is essential for applicants and individuals implementing funded projects to be aware of "customer satisfaction" levels across a wide range of potential customer groups. NIDRR grantees will be encouraged on an increasing basis to learn about and express the level, degree, and nature of usefulness of the information and results of their grant activities. Promoting customer satisfaction is at the heart of effective dissemination and utilization planning. Both applicants and grantees will be more successful if dissemination goals, objectives, and activities are carefully and effectively planned.

Utilization is the Goal

The underlying reason to gain and then disseminate new research-based information, is to assure it is appropriately considered for use in reaching decisions, making changes, or taking other specific actions designed to improve outcomes. That is, the goal of dissemination is *utilization*. Facilitating the utilization of research-based information is a complex process. Many barriers exist, both in dealing with the steps necessary for implementation and in ensuring that recipients have the skills, attitudes, and awareness levels needed to benefit from the research outcomes. Significant dissemination-oriented research literature indicates that the following factors are closely related to achieving utilization in the dissemination process:

- The information provided must include details of content, context, and resources needed before implementation can be planned in sufficient detail (Fullan, 1985; Mace-Matluck, 1986; Pollard, 1989; University of Wisconsin-Stout, 1989).

- The individual needs of information users will vary according to the levels of use and stages of personal concern demonstrated (Bradsher, 1995; Carrillo, Lumbley & Westbrook, 1984; Hall & Hord, 1987).
- Information users will more effectively implement change if they, themselves, understand the process and the flow of activities that will be involved (Blasiotti, 1992; Hall & Hord, 1987; Pollard & Rood, 1989).
- Programs and practices must be adapted to meet the particular needs of each individual organization (Duarte & Rice, 1992; Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984; Deal, 1986).
- All parties involved in the utilization or implementation process must be able to contribute to planning (Leung, 1992; Westbrook & Botterbusch, 1989).
- Users will accept assistance, information, and ideas from sources they believe to be credible and trustworthy (Baker, 1984; Carrillo, Lumbley & Westbrook, 1984; Fullan, 1985).
- The utilization process requires time and support from beginning to end (Fullan, 1982; Hall & Hord, 1987; National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, 1996). It also requires personal involvement; outside organizations must provide some level of in-person support including follow-up and ongoing feedback and exchange (Fullan, 1985; Louis, Kell, Dentler, Corwin, & Harriott, 1984).

Philosophical Framework of Dissemination and Utilization

Experience and literature support the need for a philosophical or conceptual framework for dissemination and utilization processes. The following major elements apply to the work of the NCDDR with NIDRR grantees:

- Dissemination is a process requiring a careful match among (a) the creation of products or knowledge, and the context of that creation, (b) the target audiences, and (c) the content, media, formats, and language used in getting the outcomes into the hands (and minds) of those target audiences. It is far more than the simple distribution of paper or products.

- The goal of all dissemination should be utilization. Utilization may mean different things to different members of a target audience; in some cases, it may mean rejection of a product or research finding. The critical element of utilization is that the research outcome must be critically and thoroughly digested, and the individual must fit the new information with her or his prior understandings and experience.
- One of the most effective ways to increase utilization, and to improve the quality and relevance of research, is to involve potential users in planning and implementation of the research design itself.
- Effective dissemination and utilization require an understanding of the change process.
- Effective dissemination is critically linked to its timeliness and comprehensiveness.
- Effective dissemination of disability research requires careful planning and effort throughout the life of a research project.
- Dissemination is a process that requires ongoing support and personal intervention to achieve utilization.
- All NIDRR grantees share in the responsibility to disseminate their project results to all appropriate target audiences, and in accessible formats.

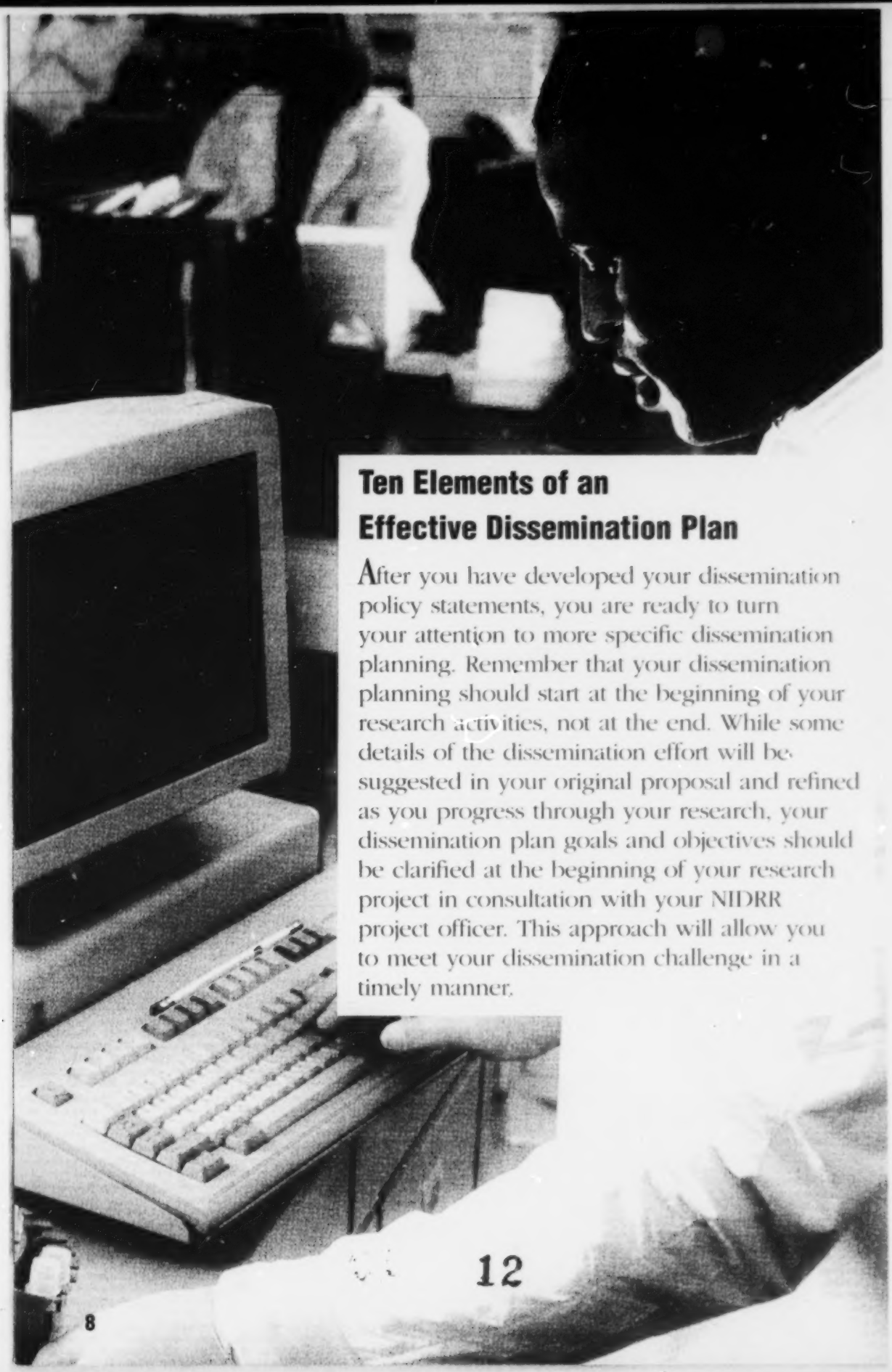
Your Dissemination Policy

A policy statement is a way many institutions express accomplishment of their mission and values to their staff and to the public. Policies serve as a foundation for the implementation of procedures and often address areas that are regulated by legal requirements. In addition, policies help establish the variety of ways that staff can respond to help accomplish the stated institutional mission.

Policies help guide staff by establishing a common vision and a "standard" of accepted behaviors to demonstrate in order to achieve that vision. The question is: Does dissemination deserve its own policy? Staff of the NCDDR feel that the development of such a policy could benefit you in several ways:

- It helps to clarify the value placed upon dissemination by your NIDRR grantee organization.
- It provides an opportunity to consider the impact dissemination, and decisions reached about it, have on the ultimate utilization of your research-based information.
- It facilitates a clarification of the intended groups of users for the information generated through your disability research function.
- It establishes the value and measures that will be engaged to achieve "ease of access and simplicity of comprehension and use" — in other words, accessibility.
- It reduces staff confusion about the correct course of action and, as a result, lowers staff costs and increases timeliness of response time.
- It describes what steps you will take to ensure that the general public is aware of the availability of alternate formats of your material.
- It provides an opportunity to clarify how your dissemination policy facilitates accomplishment of the organization's mission.
- It clarifies the extent to which you will communicate your dissemination policy to the public, reinforcing awareness of the availability of accessible, timely information, and technical assistance to support its utilization.
- It provides an opportunity to describe how the success of your dissemination policy will be evaluated and with what frequency it may be modified.

A dissemination policy can be a very effective and low-cost method of addressing issues of dissemination and utilization. Although impacting the lives of end-users is often a goal of many human intensive research projects service projects seldom do these projects and home-organizations explain how efforts of dissemination will be tied to utilization.



Ten Elements of an Effective Dissemination Plan

After you have developed your dissemination policy statements, you are ready to turn your attention to more specific dissemination planning. Remember that your dissemination planning should start at the beginning of your research activities, not at the end. While some details of the dissemination effort will be suggested in your original proposal and refined as you progress through your research, your dissemination plan goals and objectives should be clarified at the beginning of your research project in consultation with your NIDRR project officer. This approach will allow you to meet your dissemination challenge in a timely manner.

1. **Goals:** Determine and document the goals of your dissemination effort for your proposed project.
2. **Objectives:** Associate each goal with one or more objectives that clarifies what you are trying to accomplish through your dissemination activities.
3. **Users:** Describe the scope and characteristics of the "potential users" that your dissemination activities are designed to reach for each of your objectives.
4. **Content:** Identify the basic elements of the projected content you have to disseminate to each of the potential user groups identified.
5. **Source(s):** Identify the primary source or sources that each potential user group is already tied into or most respects as an information source. Consider ways to partner with these sources in your dissemination efforts.
6. **Medium:** Describe the medium or media through which the content of your message can best be best delivered to your potential users and describe the capabilities and resources that will be required of potential users to access the content for each medium to be used.
7. **Success:** Describe how you will know if your dissemination activities have been successful. If data is to be gathered, describe how, when, and who will gather it.
8. **Access:** Describe how you will promote access to your information and how you will archive information that may be requested at a later date. Consider that most people will use your project-related information when they perceive a need for it—not necessarily when you have completed your research project.
9. **Availability:** Identify strategies for promoting awareness of the availability of your research-based information and the availability of alternate available formats.
10. **Barriers:** Identify potential barriers that may interfere with the targeted users' access or utilization of your information and develop actions to reduce these barriers.

Dissemination Planning through Answered Questions

The dissemination planning process assists in answering questions related to the ten elements of effective dissemination planning. **Figure 1** provides an overview of some of the research-based questions that should be answered in constructing your dissemination plan.

FIGURE 1 Common Questions to be Answered in Dissemination Planning

Elements	Questions
Goals	What effect is your dissemination effort aimed at producing?
	What group or groups will your efforts benefit?
	In what ways will the group or groups benefit from your efforts?
Objectives	In terms of each goal, what major areas of accomplishments will be required?
	In terms of each major area of accomplishment, what quantity and/or quality will be required for success?
Users	Is your research design clearly related to specific intended groups of "users" or beneficiaries of your project's results?
	Do you have different dissemination and utilization outcomes for targeted primary and/or secondary (if applicable) user group(s)?
	Have you collaborated with identified intended user group(s) to determine dissemination goals and activities?
	What needs assessment data do you have to identify the extent of motivation or readiness of your intended user group(s) to access information in the project's topical area?
	Is your dissemination strategy directly targeted to intended users by name?
	Are your intended user group(s) known well enough for you to describe such dissemination-related characteristics as: • average reading/comprehension level, • dominant language, • level/scope of desired information, and • accessibility requirements?

Content	Is the reading/comprehension level required to understand your project's information analyzed and matched to the characteristics of your intended user groups?
	Does the content of project information match the expressed informational needs of the intended user groups?
	Do you provide examples or demonstrations of how to use, and the implications of use of your research-based information?
	Is your content reviewed through a quality control mechanism to assure accuracy and relevance?
	Has your user group(s) been involved in developing content and in field-testing (or other review) and revision of your project information?
	Is your project information available in languages that are dominant among your intended user group(s)?
	Does your dissemination plan address factors that may promote use of your information, such as staff time budgetary, or efficiency implications?
Source(s)	Is your project/organization perceived by user groups as an active information dissemination resource?
	Would collaborating with another project, organization, association, or institution for dissemination purposes, strengthen the credibility and receptivity for your information?
	Do users regard your project staff as highly knowledgeable resources in the project's topical area?
	Is your project "partnering" in any way with nationally recognized associations, organizations, institutions of higher education, or other entities in the scientific community?
	Is your project collaborating with any other organization(s) or association(s) in order to use their current information networks and vehicles reaching one or more of your targeted audiences?

Figure 1 continued on page 12

Figure 1: Dissemination Planning through Answered Questions, *continued*

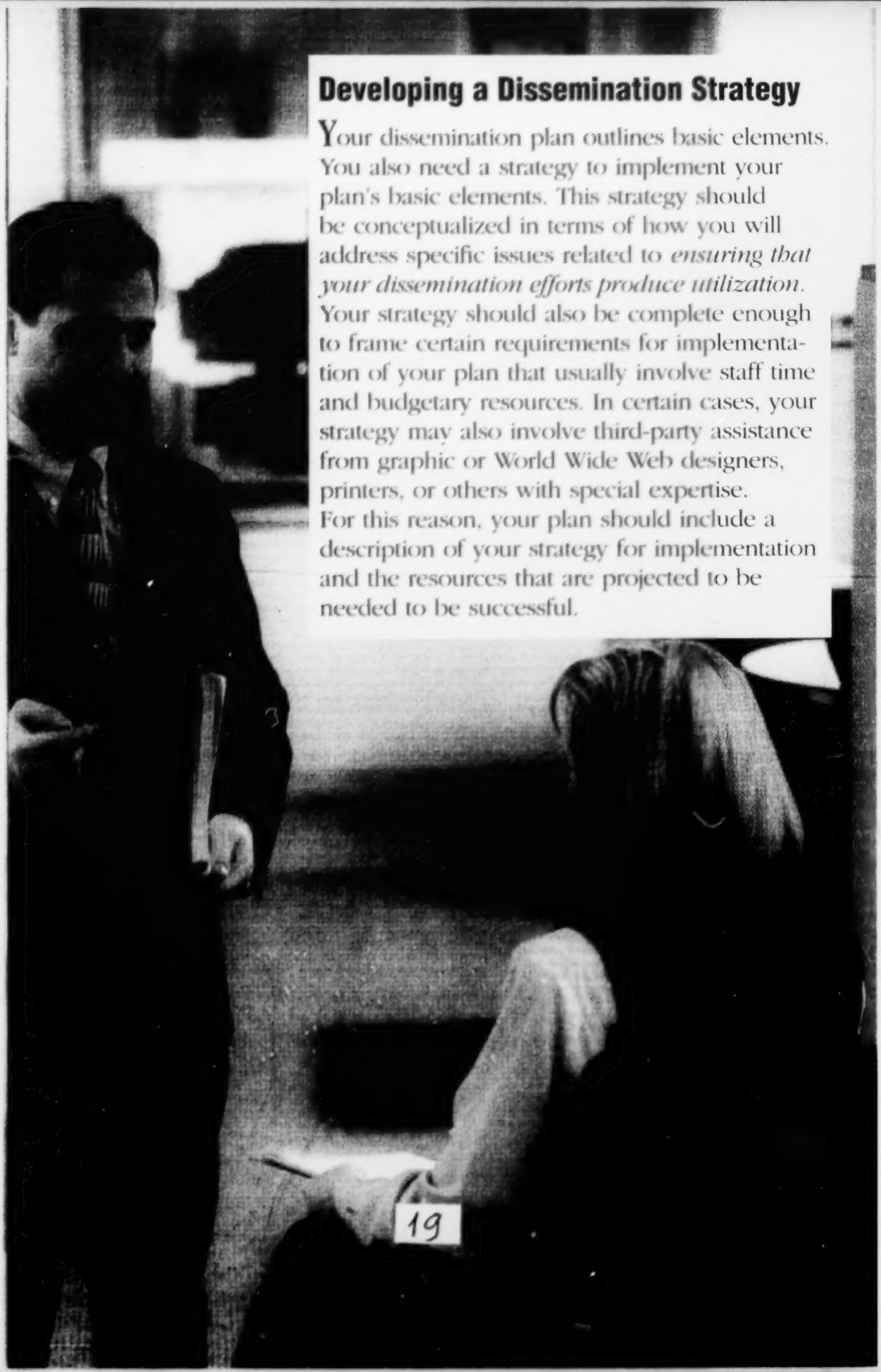
Medium	What resources, knowledge, and information are needed by your intended user to understand and apply your message?
	Does your content include "real world" examples and illustrations that communicate to non-technical user group(s)?
	Is your information to be delivered through existing networks, communication channels, associations/ organizations, meetings/conferences, and other venues?
	How does each dissemination format and mode you use or plan to use reach your target audience(s)?
	Are you using media channels that are currently reaching your target audience(s)?
Success	Have you sampled your user group(s) regarding information previously received from your project to determine their satisfaction with its communication style, content of message, and accessibility?
	Does your research or project design clearly describe measurable outcomes to assess impact/use by each user group?
	Does your project provide technical assistance to facilitate understanding/implementation of your information for each intended user group?
	Do you, at least annually, evaluate the impact of your dissemination activities in terms of both process and outcome measures?
	Does your project use past dissemination impact evaluation data to guide new plans for dissemination?

Access	Do you provide your project information in alternate formats that are accessible to all members of the intended user group(s)?
	Do you share and allow requests for information through multiple means, for example, telephone, fax, mail, e-mail, and other modes upon request?
	Has your project staff conducted a needs assessment to determine users' general accessibility requirements?
	Are you providing information to users through channels (visual, auditory, etc.) they are known to prefer?
	Is your project information delivered directly to intended users?
	Is your project information available in full-text format through the Internet?
	How will your disseminated information be evaluated by users in terms of its ease of use?
	Does your dissemination plan describe a strategy to conduct personal follow-up with users to assess customer satisfaction and usefulness?
Availability	Do you have activities planned to inform targeted group(s) about the availability of your information?
	Are you providing awareness of availability of your information in alternate formats and through a variety of modes or channels?

Figure 1 continued on page 12

Figure 1: **Dissemination Planning through Answered Questions**, *continued*

Barriers	Has a representative sample of your intended user groups been meaningfully involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating the project's activities?
	Does your plan bring the project's researchers into frequent personal dialogue with members of the intended user group(s)?
	Do you provide periodic feedback to your user groups regarding your dissemination-related impact evaluation data?
	Do you measure the cost-effectiveness of various dissemination-related strategies you may have used?
	Has an assessment been conducted within the last two years of the intended actual user groups' perceived information needs?
	Is the amount of technical information included in your research-based materials responsive to expressed technical information needs of your user groups?
	Do you make information available in any alternate format requested by individual users?
	Does your dissemination strategy include opportunities for person-to-person contact with users?
	Does your project periodically sample to determine the manner in which users learn about the availability of your project's information?
	Does your project staff who engage in discussions with user groups have both technical knowledge and effective communication skills related to your dissemination goals?



Developing a Dissemination Strategy

Your dissemination plan outlines basic elements. You also need a strategy to implement your plan's basic elements. This strategy should be conceptualized in terms of how you will address specific issues related to *ensuring that your dissemination efforts produce utilization*. Your strategy should also be complete enough to frame certain requirements for implementation of your plan that usually involve staff time and budgetary resources. In certain cases, your strategy may also involve third-party assistance from graphic or World Wide Web designers, printers, or others with special expertise. For this reason, your plan should include a description of your strategy for implementation and the resources that are projected to be needed to be successful.

The most successful strategies for implementation of your dissemination plan will be broad-based and developed in such a way that unexpected "surprises" do not cause it to fail. **Figure 2** describes issues that your dissemination strategy may need to address.

FIGURE 2 Possible Issues Related to Dissemination Strategizing

Users
- Limited user readiness to change
- Widely divergent format and level of information needed
- Multiple levels of contextual information needed
- Less than clear relevance to own needs
- Variety of dissemination media preferred
- Limited number of information sources trusted

Source
- Low level of perceived competence
- Limited credibility of experience
- Suspicion regarding motive
- Lack of sensitivity to user concerns
- Limited relationships to other sources trusted by users

Content
- Low confidence in quality of research and development methodology
- Limited credibility of outcomes
- Restricted comprehensiveness of outcomes
- Unclear utility and relevance for users
- Non-user friendly format
- Costs or equipment required to access
- Lack of statistical power in research design, procedures, and data analyses

Context
- Limited applicability to current issues in the field
- Competing knowledge or products
- General economic climate and circumstances
- Lack of relationship between outcomes and existing personal knowledge or products

Medium
- Limited physical capacity to reach intended users
- Long timeframes required to access
- Unclear accessibility and ease of use
- Lack of flexibility
- Limited reliability
- Cost effectiveness
- Limited clarity and attractiveness of the information "package"

Timing

The best time for dissemination planning is during the proposal development process. It is at this time that you have, perhaps, the most flexibility to plan and to allocate staff time and budgetary resources. While it is true that you do not know what your research will show prior to actually engaging in the research, you can project what you think might be learned and the audiences that would potentially benefit from knowing those outcomes. Once that is done, you can plan activities that would facilitate your outreach to those audiences during the course of your research project(s).

Appropriately timing your planning for dissemination is important in order to: (1) give sufficient "lead time" to affiliate with other organizations, associations, and institutions as may be beneficial; (2) organize and develop information sharing opportunities with key target audiences; (3) involve key expertise that may be resident on your project staff; and (4) budget for public awareness campaigns and other strategies to successfully reach out to targeted groups. Effective dissemination does have staff time and budget implications that need to be projected and included in your initial proposal planning and development efforts.

Training Events and Product Development

Dissemination planning provides an opportunity for dissemination goals, strategies, and activities to be conceptualized and carefully considered. In your planning process, it is important to remember that training events, such as:

- conferences,
- workshops,
- academic courses,
- meetings,
- computer-based discussion lists, and

products, such as:

- reports,
- journal articles,
- video tapes,
- newsletters, and
- web sites

are primary tools that may or may not help you reach your dissemination goals with certain target audiences. A thoughtful dissemination plan allows you to move beyond the simple listing of events and products as your dissemination strategy. The most effective dissemination outreach efforts are not designed in broad-brush fashion to equally reach any and all of your designated target audiences through a single training event or product. An effective dissemination planning process will select from the wide range of dissemination *tools* that are available and identify one or more that are "tailored" to promote achievement of your dissemination goals with each specific group within your target audience.

Dissemination Assistance and Resources

The National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR) is a resource available to grantees of NIDRR. The activities of the NCDDR include the following areas:

Research Activities (surveys, focus groups, and other data collection strategies to clarify information needs among a variety of target groups);

Demonstration Activities (designed and conducted to test the effectiveness of innovative approaches to increasing access and use of research outcomes developed by NIDRR grantees);

Dissemination and Utilization Activities (provide concrete supports to centralize access and focus on knowledge surrounding major areas of NIDRR research and related activities); and

Technical Assistance Activities (provided to NIDRR grantees through information sharing and consultation as well as through joint planning and implementation of dissemination/utilization plans).

More specifically, the work of the NCDDR provides information and assistance that should be useful to NIDRR grantees as they go about planning and implementing their dissemination activities. Following is a fuller description of the NCDDR activities and the resources and information they offer:

Research Activities. The NCDDR research activities are designed to collect information that will assist in identifying the needs and most likely strategies that will assist in matching dissemination practices with intended user groups. Major activities of the NCDDR in this area include:

- Collecting survey information on an annual basis from large numbers of key potential target audiences for disability research outcomes including:
  - Persons with disabilities and their families
  - Community-based independent living centers
  - Consumer groups and advocacy organizations
  - Direct disability service organizations
  - Healthcare professionals
  - Journalists
  - Mayor's and Governor's committees on employment
  - Researchers, including NIDRR grantees
  - State and Federal legislators and aides
  - State directors of special education
  - State vocational rehabilitation agency directors
- Conducting focus groups to identify innovations and test the appropriateness of findings from survey and other information collection activities.
- Reporting findings through special reports and the NCDDR publication, *The Research Exchange.*

Demonstration Activities. NCDDR demonstration activities are conducted to determine the effectiveness of new strategies and approaches in achieving intended dissemination and utilization outcomes. Generally, these activities facilitate:

- Developing and using innovative and accessible World Wide Web information and feedback mechanisms;
- Centralizing and contributing to Spanish language information sources describing disability research outcomes of NIDRR grantees;
- Increasing use of currently available information and statistical resources supported through NIDRR funding;
- Accessing and using collections of topical and research outcome information and materials produced through NIDRR funding;

- Networking and information sharing of NIDRR grantees regarding effective dissemination and utilization practices used in outreach to specific target audiences;
- Developing and implementing strategies for public information and marketing campaigns;
- Conducting effective techniques for outreach in rural settings; and
- Collecting, assessing, and accessing major archival public data sets frequently used in disability research activities.

Dissemination and Utilization Activities. The goal of the NCDDR's dissemination process is not the simple distribution of materials and other resources but rather the use of research outcomes in meaningful ways by those searching for such information. Major activities in this area include:

- Expanding successful demonstration activity outcomes into wider use among NIDRR grantees;
- Maintaining a toll-free telephone, electronic, and fax communication channels for use by grantees and others;
- Producing and distributing new informational resources highlighting the outcomes of NIDRR grantees;
- Expanding World Wide Web doorways to topically-oriented information in broad areas such as: health and function, independent living, employment, technology, community integration, disability statistics, knowledge dissemination and utilization, and others;
- Identifying "best practice" models in dissemination and utilization conducted by NIDRR grantees;
- Establishing and maintaining a series of discussion lists that can be accessed by a wide range of audiences interested in learning more about specific areas of research outcomes;
- Convening NIDRR grantees with a major dissemination and utilization focus for periodic collaboration and coordination; and
- Surveying and reporting the state-of-the-art in dissemination and utilization practices of NIDRR grantees.

Technical Assistance Activities. Information and support services are provided by the NCDDR. Technical assistance offerings are designed to build understanding, skills, and resources related to the dissemination and utilization of disability research outcomes. Major activities in this area are:

- Providing tailored onsite technical assistance support to grantees upon request;
- Developing and providing individualized technical assistance information packets, mail lists, and other resources requested by grantees;
- Providing logistical support to grantees in developing alternate formats of materials;
- Assisting grantees in developing in-depth dissemination and utilization plans;
- Developing and distributing issues of *The Research Exchange* to NIDRR grantees highlighting various technical assistance areas related to effective dissemination and utilization;
- Providing assistance to grantees in planning and conducting evaluations of their dissemination and utilization outcomes;
- Providing mechanisms for grantees to use in assessing use and satisfaction among viewers of their Web site; and
- Facilitating development of case stories exemplifying the value of NIDRR grant outcomes.

Most NCDDR services and products are provided free-of-charge to current NIDRR grantees. Grantees may contact the NCDDR staff through any of the following avenues:

Call Us: 1-800-266-1832 or 512-476-6861 V/TT

Web Site: http://www.ncddr.org/

E-mail Us: admin@ncddr.org

Write Us: National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research
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211 East Seventh Street, Suite 400
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25

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http://www.ncddr.org/du/products/dddreview/toc.html
Disability, Diversity, and Dissemination: A Review of the Literature on Topics Related to Increasing the Utilization of Rehabilitation Research Outcomes among Diverse Consumer Groups (1999). Austin, TX: National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research.

http://www.ncddr.org/du/products/dsi/index.html
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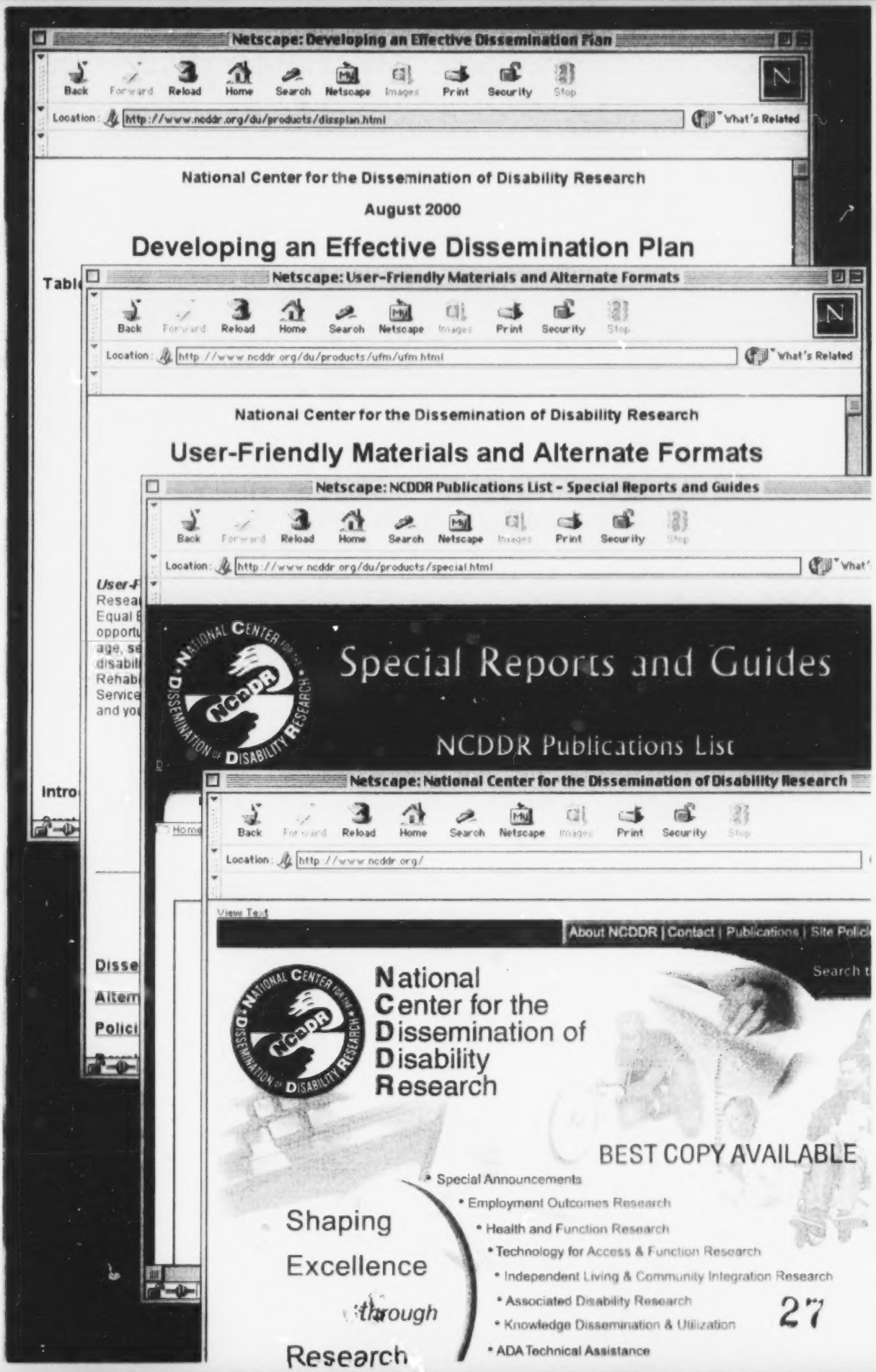
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